

## HOW WE MAY IMPROVE OUR COUNTRY SCHOOLS.

### I.—The Need of Consolidating Weak Districts.

Editors Progressive Farmer:

It is a pleasure to me to comply with your request to contribute a series of short articles on the improvement of our country schools. I count it a privilege to have the opportunity of speaking through your columns to the people most vitally concerned about this matter. The country schools can be improved and made adequate to the proper education of the country people only through the co-operative efforts of the people that dwell in the rural districts.

Just as the town people have made their schools, so the country people must make theirs. They can do this if they will. I have an abiding faith in the power of our sturdy North Carolina yeomanry to accomplish whatever they determine. Every sincere friend of the rural schools should appreciate the constant zeal and kindly support and co-operation of The Progressive Farmer in every wise and sensible effort to improve these schools.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF RURAL ADVANCEMENT

More than 82 per cent of the population of North Carolina is rural and agricultural. At least nine-tenths of this rural population is and must continue to be dependent upon the rural public schools for education—and this in an age when education is no longer a luxury but a necessity, and when all other civilized States and lands are providing the best possible educational facilities for all these people. Unless we improve the country schools (the only hope of educating at least eight-tenths of our people) and make these schools adequate to the educational demands of the age and somewhat equal in the educational opportunities offered to those offered in the public schools of other States and countries, a deterioration of our rural population must inevitably result, and in the intense moral, intellectual and commercial conflicts of this intense age, North Carolina must fight a losing fight with other States, the great masses of whose population are better trained and better educated.

The real power of any State is in the many, not in the few. No human power can calculate the loss of power that has resulted and will continue to result from the inadequate training and education of eight-tenths of our population on account of the lack of properly equipped public schools. Unless these rural public schools can be improved and made to offer somewhat equal educational advantages to those offered by the town and city schools, the disastrous drains of the best blood of the country by the towns and cities must continue, and the time is not far hence when there will be left in the country only a peasant population too indifferent and ignorant to appreciate the value and necessity of education, or too hopeless and ambitionless to go elsewhere to seek it. No greater calamity than this can befall any people.

Every lover of his State, therefore, must feel keenly the exceeding importance of preserving and developing the rural population and the necessity of making the rural schools adequate to the part they must play in this great work. The strength of our State must be measured by the strength of eight-tenths of our population. Every good citizen, therefore, and especially every good citizen dwelling in the country, ought to be willing to co-operate heartily with every reasonable effort to improve the rural public schools and ought to be willing to make any reasonable sacrifices that may seem to be necessary for their improvement.

#### THE PROGRESSIVE FARMER'S HOBBIES

With good roads, rural telephones, free rural delivery and good schools, the country will be the ideal place to live and to educate men and

women. The world, or all that is best in it, could thus be brought into the country without taking the country into the world and subjecting it to all that is worst in it. Good schools and the general intelligence disseminated by them would hasten the bringing of these other things into the country; and on the other hand, of course good roads and rural telephones and the easy dissemination of news and literature through free rural delivery would hasten the improvement of the schools and become, in connection with them, potent factors in the education of the people. These forces that make the progress, prosperity and happiness of a people are strangely bound together in mutual helpfulness and rarely travel singly.

I desire to offer some suggestions for improving the country schools. These suggestions are the results of a sympathetic study, as careful as the means and time at my command have permitted, of the existing conditions of the country schools and the causes thereof. The first means for the improvement of the rural schools to which I desire to invite the careful and unprejudiced consideration of your readers is the enlargement of the school districts by reasonable consolidation of unnecessary small districts.

In the outset, I wish it understood that I recognize the right of every child to be within reasonable reach of some public school-house; that I have never advocated and shall not now advocate consolidation of districts beyond the point of leaving a school-house within reasonable walking distance of every child; and that I do not consider consolidation on so large a scale as would necessitate the transportation of children, practicable and feasible in North Carolina with the present condition of our roads and our present small school fund. Having walked three miles to school every day of my life while getting my preparation for college, I must say that I do not consider this an unreasonable distance for a few healthy children to walk over an ordinary road in order to have a good school for themselves and all other children of the district.

In the first place, let me call your attention to some facts appearing from the reports of the County Superintendents and of the State Superintendent that ought to convince any reasonable man of the need of a reduction of the number of school districts and the enlargement of the average school district by reasonable consolidation of many of the unreasonably small school districts.

#### SCHOOLHOUSES ONLY ONE OR TWO MILES APART

There are 5,370 white and 2,346 colored school districts in North Carolina. The inhabitable area of the State is 48,000 square miles. The average size of the white school district is, therefore, 8.9 square miles. A simple calculation will show that in the average district of this size the school-house, if centrally located in a district of reasonably regular shape, would be about two miles from the farthest child and within one mile of a large majority of the children of the district. Of course many districts are larger than this, but many must also be much smaller in order to make this small average.

It is a fact that in spite of the law directing that no school-house shall be built within less than three miles of another school-house, except for sparsity of population and geographical barriers, such as streams, swamps, mountains, etc., there are hundreds of school-houses in North Carolina within a mile or a mile and a half of each other. A simple calculation will show that if the average area of the school district in North Carolina could be doubled and the number of districts reduced to half the present number, a house centrally located in this larger average district containing 17 8-10 square miles would still be within three miles of the farthest child and within less than two miles of the great majority of the children.

The total white school population of the State is 455,520; the average number of white children to the district is 84. The total colored school population is 220,920; the average number of colored children to the district is 93. In 1902, the average number of white children to the district was only 73 and the average number of colored children to the district was only 82. This increase in the average number has, of course, been largely due to consolidation.

#### NEARLY HALF THE DISTRICTS HAVE LESS THAN SIXTY-FIVE CHILDREN

The school law directs that no school district shall be created containing less than sixty-five children of school age except for sparsity of population or geographical barriers, such as streams, mountains, etc. Reports from County Superintendents in 1902 show that 47 per cent of all white school districts and 44 per cent of all colored school districts contain less than sixty-five children of school age, the minimum fixed by law. I recently attended township meetings of the teachers in two townships in a level county practically free from impassable geographical barriers. Only one teacher in the two townships reported a census school population of sixty-five. Some of them reported a census population of less than half this number. In these townships I passed a little one-room school-house for every mile or two and failed to see a single school-house of more than one room.

In next week's Progressive Farmer I shall discuss the injurious effects of maintaining these many unnecessary weak districts.

J. Y. JOYNER,

State Superintendent of Public Instruction.  
Raleigh, N. C.

It has been expected ever since the recent advance in the price of cotton that fertilizer sales in North Carolina this year would break all previous records. The Department of Agriculture has not yet prepared any statement as to the increase, but Manager Carr, of the Virginia-Carolina Chemical Company, reports that thus far sales are 18 per cent in excess of last year's—and last year's, we understand, were the largest on record.

The Progressive Farmer is extremely fortunate in having a series of articles on "How We May Improve Our Rural Schools," written by the man best qualified to discuss this topic—Hon. J. Y. Joyner, our able State Superintendent of Public Instruction. The first number of Prof. Joyner's series appears to-day. Every teacher and school officer in North Carolina should read these articles.

The final report of the Census Bureau, as given on another page, showed last year's crop to be smaller than the Cotton Exchange dealers had expected. The report was read in New York at noon Friday, and before night prices on May cotton advanced nearly a cent a pound, reaching almost exactly the figures prevailing before the Sully failure.

"The State Fair Advance Premium List of Field and Garden Products" is just out, and will be sent to any farmer on application to Secretary J. E. Pogue, Raleigh, N. C. We are glad to note that the premiums on general farm display, display from a one-horse and from a two-horse farm have been increased 50 per cent over those heretofore offered.

#### A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK.

It was prettily devised of Aesop—the fly sat upon the axle-tree of the chariot wheel, and said: "What a dust I do raise!" So are there some vain persons, that whatsoever goeth alone, or moveth upon greater means, if they have never so little hand in it, they think it is they that carry it.—From Lord Bacon's Essay, "Of Vain Glory."